

Classroom Bites

# Summer Squash



Green Zucchini



Yellow Zucchini



Costata Romanesco



Yellow Squash



Pattypan Squash



Cousa Squash



Zephyr Squash



Eight Ball Zucchini

## Did You Know

- Zucchini is the most common variety of summer squash. Other varieties include: pattypan squash, crookneck squash, sunburst squash, yellow squash, chayote squash, and opo squash. Summer squash are harvested in the summer and have thin skins and soft flesh. Winter squash, on the other hand, are harvested later in the season and have thick rinds.
- While most squash varieties were brought from America to Europe, zucchini originated in Italy. Zucchini means "small squash" in Italian.
- Summer squash are members of the Cucurbitaceae (Cucurbit) family, which includes melons, pumpkins, cucumbers, and gourds.
- Summer squash are referred to as vegetables since they are commonly eaten this way, and due to their nutrient make-up, they are included in the vegetable food group. Botanically speaking, summer squash are the immature fruit of the plant.

## Gardening

Summer squash are not a significant part of Montana agriculture, but are widely grown in gardens throughout the state. Often people grow so many that they will secretly leave a bag of zucchini on a neighbor's doorstep. Direct seed or transplant summer squash 10 weeks before first frost. Summer squash need full sun and plenty of room to grow. Summer squash can be planted in large containers. Good container varieties include Early Yellow Summer Crookneck and Scallopine.

## Selection

Choose squash that have firm, undamaged, and glossy skin. Large summer squash are often tough and bitter, but they can be used in recipes that call for shredded squash, such as zucchini bread. Usually squash between 4-10 inches have good flavor and are not fibrous.

## Storage

Store summer squash in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to one week. Wash directly before using.

## Nutrition Information

Summer squash are a good source of vitamin C and potassium, and contain manganese and vitamin B<sub>6</sub>. Vitamin C helps your body heal from cuts, scrapes, and even broken bones! Manganese plays an essential role in such functions as the formation of bones and healthy skeletons.

## Cooking

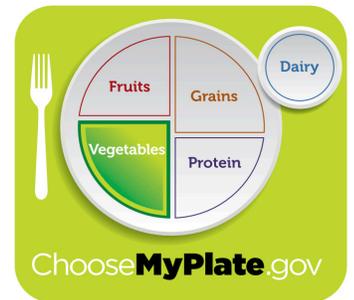
**Broil.** Set broiler to high, with the rack about six inches from heat. Cut squash in slices and drizzle with olive oil and low-sodium seasoning before placing on a baking sheet. Cook 3-5 minutes or until tender.

**Grate.** Add raw, grated squash to green salads, muffins, cookies, or use a spiral slicer to use instead of pasta noodles for added nutrients.

**Grill.** Pierce sliced squash with a skewer and place over a preheated (medium-high heat) grill. Cook 5-8 minutes or until tender. Pair squash with tomatoes, onions, mushrooms, peppers, or fruit.

**Microwave.** Place sliced squash in a microwave-safe dish with 2-3 tablespoons of water. Cover and microwave on high for 3-4 minutes or until tender.

**Preserve.** For more information on preserving summer squash, read the MontGuide Freezing Vegetables. Visit <https://nutrition.msueextension.org/> and click on the food preservation link or contact your Extension office to find the guide.



**Raw.** Rinse and dry squash to enjoy sliced in salads or dipped in hummus or yogurt. For an easy no-cook salad, toss sliced or diced squash with vinaigrette, place in refrigerator, allow to sit for at least four hours, and serve cold.

**Sauté.** Heat pan to high, add butter or oil to coat bottom of pan and add sliced squash. Sauté until lightly brown, about 3-5 minutes, or until tender. Remove from heat and use as side dish or add to vegetable dishes, lasagna, pasta, and other dishes.

**Season.** To enhance flavor, season with allspice, basil, cumin, curry powder, dill, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon, and thyme.

**Steam.** Place sliced or whole squash into steam basket. Steam 6-10 minutes for sliced squash or 12-15 minutes for whole squash.

*Adapted from the Summer Squash Food Fact Sheet developed by Montana State University Extension. For the full fact sheet and other resources, visit: <https://nutrition.msuextension.org/>.*

## Activities

### Explore Summer Squash

*Developed by: Erin Jackson, Gallatin Valley Farm to School*

#### Grades

K-5

#### Objectives

Students will:

- Compare different varieties of summer squash using observations, scientific diagrams, and descriptions.
- Discuss the differences between winter squash and summer squash.
- Taste summer squash.

#### Supplies

- 2 squash per small group of students. Use multiple varieties of summer squash, including: yellow crookneck, yellow straightneck, zucchini, patty pan/scallop.
- Paper bag(s)
- White board
- Science notebook or paper and pencil for each student
- 1 butter knife per group

#### Directions

1. Place a summer squash in a paper bag, or a few different varieties in different bags. Begin by passing around a paper bag with a summer squash in it and ask students to feel the item without looking. Once all students have felt the item, ask for students to use descriptive words to *explain* what they felt inside the bag without giving it away. Students may also make

predictions for qualities of the item they could not feel, such as color, is it a food, etc. Write these words on the board.

2. Ask a few students to share what they think the item is and why, but do not confirm nor deny their guess. Tell students that you will now unveil the mystery item(s). Slowly take the squash out of the bag and then ask students to raise their hand if they correctly guessed. Were any of the descriptions correct? Were any incorrect? Did they guess it would be green but really it was yellow? Discuss varieties of squash.
3. Explain that this month's Harvest of the Month crop is summer squash. Ask students to raise their hand if they've ever tried summer squash. Ask students to share how they have eaten summer squash in a breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a snack. Today they will all have the opportunity to taste it!
4. Ask if anyone has heard of a different kind of squash (winter squash). Explain that squash is divided into two categories, summer and winter squash, and show students examples of both. Ask students to consider what the differences are between the two (thickness of skin, when and how you eat it, size, storage, etc).
5. Divide students into small groups and pass out two summer squash of different varieties to each group. Give students time to observe and measure the squash using rulers. Next, ask students to create a Venn diagram with their findings to compare the two varieties summer squash (or one summer squash and one winter squash). With younger students it may be best to complete this as a class, while older students may work in groups.
6. Once students have completed the observation, hand out one butter knife per group. Review and demonstrate safe knife handling practices, and then have students cut each variety of squash into slices to taste. Alternately, precut the squash. As a class, say "cheers to summer squash" and then taste each variety. Ask students to record the taste and texture differences and similarities on their Venn diagrams on paper or in their science or garden notebooks.
7. Once students have completed the taste test, compare and contrast observations and make general comparisons between the varieties.

*Anyone cutting and handling the squash that will be eaten in the taste test should use proper hand washing procedures. All produce should be washed thoroughly before cooking or consumption.*

# Recipes

## Fresh Summer Squash Salad

This no-cook recipe is perfect for using produce from the school garden.

*Developed by: Morgan Kelly, Montana Dietetic Intern*

### Servings

4

### Ingredients

- 3 small zucchini, rinsed, thinly sliced into half moons, can use any type or a variety of summer squash
- 5-6 radishes, rinsed, thinly sliced crosswise
- 2 carrots, rinsed, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1 tsp chopped garlic
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Preparation

1. Wash and prepare all vegetables.
2. In salad bowl, mix garlic, lemon juice, mustard, honey, vinegar, salt, and pepper.
3. Toss in chopped vegetables; stir until all vegetables are coated in dressing.
4. Allow to rest in refrigerator for at least 30 minutes, serve.

## Baked Zucchini Chips

Go beyond the zucchini bread--this is a fun way to eat summer squash!

*Source: Skinny Mom Blog*

### Servings

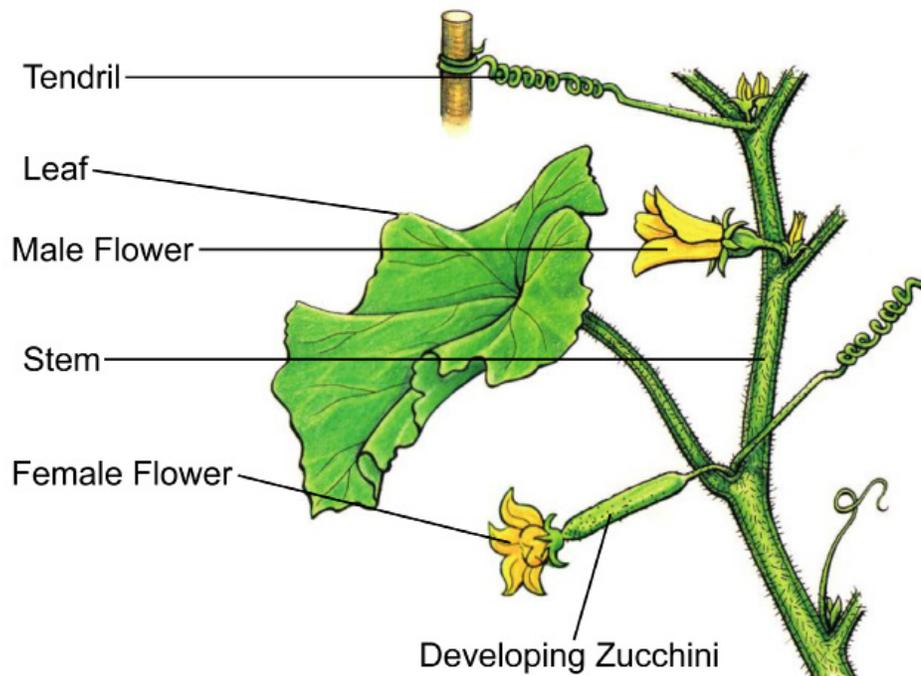
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### Ingredients

- 1 small zucchini, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Lightly mist one baking sheet with cooking spray.
2. Slice zucchini into 1/8 – 1/4 inch thick rounds. Toss zucchini with olive oil to coat evenly and spread zucchini on baking sheet in a single layer. Sprinkle on salt and pepper.
3. Bake zucchini rounds until browned and crisp, about 25 to 30 minutes, flipping each over halfway through.
4. Check the chips often as cooking times may vary. Rotate the chips around the baking sheet if needed.
5. Once crisp and browned, let cool and store at room temperature. Enjoy the same day for best crunch!



## Book Nook

*Carlos and the Squash Plant*,  
by Jan Stevens

*The Giant Zucchini*, Catherine Siracusa

*I Heard it from Alice Zucchini*, by Juanita Havill



## Dig Deeper

For sources and photo credits along with more recipes, lessons, quick activities, resources, and guides, visit: [mtharvestofthemonth.org](http://mtharvestofthemonth.org).



### 4 Montana Harvest of the Month: **Summer Squash**



The Montana Harvest of the Month program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana schools and communities. This program is a collaboration between Montana Farm to School, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Team Nutrition Program, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Montana State University Extension, Gallatin Valley Farm to School, Montana Department of Agriculture, Montana Organic Association, and FoodCorps Montana. More information and resources are available at: [mtharvestofthemonth.org](http://mtharvestofthemonth.org)

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